

Haemophilus Influenzae Type-B Illness

Last Revised: 09/24/2001

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Last Revised: 10/2001

Haemophilus Influenzae Type-B Illness (*aka, Hib Disease*)

Haemophilus influenzae type-b (Hib) is a bacterium that causes serious, sometimes fatal illnesses, most often in young children. Some of the diseases it can cause include: Meningitis (an infection of the coverings of the brain), Epiglottitis (an infection of the upper throat and entrance to the windpipe), Cellulitis (an infection of the deep tissues, especially of the face and neck). Arthritis (an infection and swelling of the joints), Pneumonia (an infection of the lung), and bacteremia (blood stream) infections.

Who gets this disease?

These illnesses are primarily seen in children under five-years -of-age. Children under age two are most susceptible because their immune systems are not yet able to fight the bacteria. Rarely, older children and adults may develop infection. It appears that in a setting such as the household or child care facility-where there are young children and everyone is in close contact-there is an increased risk of one of these contacts developing Hib infection following a first case.

How is it spread?

The bacterium is passed from person-to-person by breathing in infected droplets of nose or throat fluids scattered in the air or by direct contact with these infected secretions. The bacteria cannot live on environmental surfaces - they quickly shrivel and die. Like *Menigococcus*, some people can "carry" this bacterium for a period of time without it causing illness. However, a carrier may spread the bacteria to another person who may then become ill. In a household or child care center in which Hib infection has occurred, the number of persons with nose or throat carriage is greatly increased; thus, risk of serious disease is also increased.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Illnesses caused *Haemophilus influenzae* type-b are diagnosed by signs and symptoms and by examining the blood and/or spinal fluid for white blood cells

and bacteria. Spinal fluid is obtained by a physician performing a lumbar puncture (i.e., spinal tap). People with these infections generally require hospitalization and are treated with antibiotics.

How can the spread of this disease be prevented?

1. If a person develops an illness caused by Hib, close contacts of this patient (including family members and persons having intimate contact such as sleeping together, hugging and kissing) are at increased risk of developing the illness. In this situation a physician may recommend: 1) carefully watching for early symptoms of illness caused by *Haemophilus influenzae* AND/OR 2) taking a preventive antibiotic to eliminate the bacteria from the body before disease begins.
2. Any child or adult contact that develops symptoms consistent with Hib infection requires evaluation by a health care provider **regardless** of whether or not this person has taken preventive antibiotics.
3. A vaccination against Hib infection is available; and the NH Division of Public Health Services recommends that all children begin the vaccine series against HIB infection at two-months-of-age. The vaccination is **not required** for school entry. Children in child care aged 15-60 months are required to have on Hib vaccination in order to attend. Parents with specific questions about the Hib vaccine and their child should contact their children's physicians.
4. Notify parents or guardians about the occurrence of this illness and urge them to contact their physicians for specific medical care advice.
5. Contact the Bureau of Disease Control for recommendations about preventing spread of this illness and assistance in implementing them.

Who should be excluded?

Children and staff who are ill with Hib infection should be excluded while they are ill and until 24 hours of antibiotic therapy has been completed.

Reportable?

Yes, *Haemophilus influenzae* illnesses are reportable by New Hampshire law.